
Director General, Monitoring and Assessment

John Pullinger
National Statistician
Office for National Statistics
By email

10 June 2016

Dear John

The Coherence and Accessibility of Official Statistics on Income and Earnings

I wrote to you in January expressing my disappointment at the slow progress that had been made against the recommendations set out in our Monitoring Review: *The Coherence and Accessibility of Official Statistics on Income and Earnings*. I explained at the time that we would be asking ONS, DWP and HMRC to demonstrate more extensive progress across the range of recommendations, ahead of a further update on progress in May 2016.

Following a meeting of the Review team with departmental representatives in March, we received an update from ONS on 4 May 2016, which summarises the progress that ONS and DWP have made to date, followed by an update by HMRC on 11 May. It is unfortunate that this response was not a coordinated, joint response as we had expected.

The update includes some positive developments since January, such as plans for the more timely publication of ONS and DWP household income statistics and efforts by the household income statisticians to improve their user engagement and provide a more coherent analysis of income inequality; and HMRC's investigations into the feasibility publishing more timely information from Real Time Information PAYE data. However, there continues to be a lack of substantive progress against, and clear ambition to meet, the vast majority of the outstanding recommendations, including those highlighted in both the [Review's report](#) and our January 2016 [Progress report](#) as priority areas for improvement:

- engaging with a range of stakeholders to develop solutions to address the timeliness of statistics on income from self-employment;
- improving accessibility to the wide range of statistics available and their underpinning data, and improving guidance on their strengths and limitations; and
- considering how best to provide users with more themed analyses in a way that remains current and sustainable

In light of this partial and disappointing picture, I would appreciate it if you could coordinate a formal response to our Review in the form of an action plan which sets out whether you intend to address each recommendation and if so, what is the 'road map' to doing so. I would be grateful if you could share this Action Plan with me by 8 July 2016.

There are many synergies between our Review's recommendations and the findings highlighted in Sir Charles Bean's *Independent Review of Economic Statistics (Bean Review)*, including for ONS statisticians to be more outward facing to better meet the needs of users; the need for more timely and accurate measures of earnings for the self-employed; and improving accessibility to data more generally. I hope that these synergies will provide an opportunity to address common areas across both Reviews comprehensively and efficiently.

I am aware that ONS published its draft Economic Statistics and Analysis Strategy on 16 May, seeking stakeholder comments before it is finalised. This therefore presents an opportunity to crystallise the priorities and timetable relating to developments to income and earnings statistics.

I am copying this letter to Jonathan Athow and Glen Everett at ONS, Neil McIvor at DWP and Sean Whellams at HMRC.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ed Humpherson', written in a cursive style.

Ed Humpherson